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PRRC emerging trends

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Surge Found In Religious Interest

PRINCETON, N.J. – A recent survey conducted by the Gallup Organization for the Christian Broadcasting Network clearly indicates a rising tide of interest and involvement in religion among all levels of society.

Six in 10 Americans (57%) say they are more interested in religious and spiritual matters than they were five years ago. A majority of 56% say they are more reliant on God than five years ago, while as many as four in 10 say their spiritual well-being has improved.

The survey also reveals a growing conviction that religion, rather than science, can answer the problems of the world, with 54% saying they are more likely than five years ago to feel that religion can answer the problems of the world and 26% saying less likely.

By way of comparison, 36% say they are now more likely than five years ago to believe science can answer the problems of the world, while 47% say they are less likely to do so.

GROWTH SEEN IN BIBLE STUDY

Survey evidence indicates that Americans are searching with a new intensity for spiritual moorings in their lives. This search is taking the form of a growth in Bible study groups, religious education classes, and evangelism. In addition, the charismatic movement shows no signs of abating.

The CBN survey also reveals that a solid majority of persons interviewed think it is very important for Americans to become more interested and involved in religious and spiritual matters. This is the dominant view among all major population groups.

4 IN 10 HAVE TAKEN PART IN ACTIVITIES

Four in 10 adults have recently taken part in one or more of the 10 religious activities (other than formal worship) tested in the survey. The figure is one in two among Protestants.

Highest participation is recorded for Bible study, with one person in four (26%) currently involved in this activity.

U.S. adults are presently engaged in the following religious activities, ranked in order of frequency of mention. Projections to the approximate millions of adults involved are shown in the right-hand column.

PARTICIPATION IN RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

	Percent	Projections (millions)
Bible study groups	26%	43
Religious education classes	19	34
Prayer and meditation groups	17	30
Witnessing	13	23
Evangelism	9	16
Missionary work	8	14
Healing	5	9
Speaking in tongues	4	7
Prophecy	4	7
The charismatic movement	3	5

INVOLVEMENT AMONG YOUTH IS ALSO HIGH

One of the more interesting findings is that younger adults, who traditionally are less involved in organized religion than their elders, take part in most of the activities tested to nearly the same extent as older people, and in some cases to a greater extent.

It is also important to note that persons with a college background are as likely to be involved in these religious activities as are persons with less formal education.

RISING INTEREST SEEN AMONG COLLEGE YOUTH

The growth in religious interest and involvement among the general public is also found among college students.

In a *Newsweek On Campus Poll*, conducted by the Gallup Organization, a return to religion is found on the college campuses of America:

- The percentage of college students who say religion is very important in their lives has increased from 39% in 1975 and 1979 to 50% at present.
- Churchgoing has increased, with 39% of students now saying they attend every week, compared to 34% in 1975.
- The proportion of college youth today who say their religious commitment has become stronger since they have been in college is twice the proportion who say it has become *weaker*.

The Bible In American Life Today

With the forty-third annual National Bible Week being observed Nov. 20-27 (in a year that has been designated by President Reagan as "The Year of the Bible"), this is an appropriate time to examine the Bible in American life today.

Specifically, this article seeks to shed light on five basic questions: (1) How much authority is placed in the Bible? (2) How does the Bible relate to people's religious and spiritual needs? (3) What do Americans believe about the Bible? (4) How often do they read the Bible? (5) What is the level of Biblical knowledge?

A Gallup survey conducted for *Christianity Today* magazine reveals that 40% of Americans would turn first to the Bible to test their own religious beliefs. The next highest proportion (27%) say they would seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, followed by 11% who said the Church. Another 22% gave other responses.

The survey also reveals that frequent Bible readers (once a day or more often) receive greater consolation from their beliefs about God than do infrequent readers.

BIBLE SEEN NECESSARY 'TO TRULY KNOW GOD'

A recent survey conducted for Dr. Robert H. Schuller, Senior Pastor of the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, by the Gallup Organization, shows that 34% feel that "holding the Bible to be God's truth" is "absolutely necessary for someone to truly know God."

In the same survey, 19% say that studying the Bible daily is the most important thing one can do if "trying to be a follower of Jesus."

The Schuller study also reveals that 39% find the best way to nourish or strengthen their faith is to read the Bible.

MOST SAY BIBLE IS WORD OF GOD

Seven in 10 Americans (72%), according to the *Christianity Today* survey, believe the Bible to be the Word of God while only 23% hold that it is not. The remaining 5% do not express an opinion.

While a large majority of Americans continue to believe the Bible is the Word of God, the current percentage, 72%, is lower than the 79% recorded in 1965 and the 83% recorded in 1952.

Those who believe the Bible is the Word of God can be further differentiated: 30% believe the Bible is sometimes mistaken in its statements and teachings and 42% believe it is not.

Here are the question and results:

Which one of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible?

- The Bible is a collection of writings representing some of the religious philosophies of ancient man 23%
- The Bible is the Word of God but is sometimes mistaken in its statements and teachings 30%
- The Bible is the Word of God and is NOT mistaken in its statements and teachings 42%
- No opinion 5%

100%

Another question, asked at intervals over the last 20 years, shows that approximately four in 10 Americans currently can be described as "literalists" – that is, they believe the Bible is the actual Word of God, to be taken literally, word for word.

Here is the question and the trend, showing a sharp decline between 1965 and 1978 in the percentage of "literalists" among the public:

Which one of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible?

- The Bible is the actual Word of God, and is to be taken literally, word for word.
- The Bible is the inspired Word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally.
- The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history and moral precepts recorded by man.

	Actual word %	Inspired word %	Book of legends %	No opinion %
1983	37	43	11	9
1982	37	42	11	10
1978	38	45	13	4
1965	65	18	11	6

ONLY 15% READ BIBLE DAILY

Despite the fact that the vast majority of American adults believe the Bible is the Word of God, only 15% read the Bible at least daily. At the other extreme, about one person in four never reads the Bible.

Here are the latest figures:

FREQUENCY OF BIBLE READING

More than once a day	2%
Daily	13
2 or 3 times a week	9
Weekly	9
2 or 3 times a month	5
Once a month	7
Less than once a month	25
Don't ever read the Bible	24
Can't recall	6
	100%

THE BIBLE IN AMERICA

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Bible readership varies a good deal on the basis of people's socioeconomic and demographic background. For example, 27% of persons over 65 claim to read the Bible at least daily.

High daily readership is also recorded in the South (23%), among non-whites (23%) and women (21%).

In contrast, only about one in 10 in the following groups reads the Bible daily: younger persons (18-24), men, Easterners, the college-educated and those living in the nation's largest cities.

Daily Bible reading among Protestants is three times as prevalent as among Catholics. Only 7% of Catholics say they read the Bible at least daily compared to 21% of Protestants.

BIBLE READING AMONG TEENS

A Gallup Youth Survey reveals that only one teenager in eight (12%) reads the Bible daily, and 30% never open the book or can't remember when they last did so.

Nearly one-fourth of teens (24%) read the Bible less often than daily but at least once a week. This figure should be viewed with caution, however, because it may well include boys and girls who read the Bible during the course of church or synagogue services.

Protestant teenagers read the Bible with greater frequency than do Catholics. While 24% of the Protestant teens say they never read the Bible, 37% of Catholic teens say the same.

While boys and girls read the Bible with just about the same frequency, younger teens of both sexes (13-15) are far more frequent Bible readers than are their older (16-18) siblings. And in another interesting survey result, black teenagers read the Bible with significantly greater frequency than do whites.

Teenagers whose academic standing is above average were found to read the Bible more frequently than their average or below average counterparts.

Teens who attend church weekly are far more likely than non-regular churchgoers to read the Bible, although one in six infrequent churchgoers nonetheless reads the Bible at least once a week. And even among these non-regular churchgoers, more than half (57%) read the Bible at least once in a while.

KNOWLEDGE OF BIBLE IS SHOCKINGLY LOW

Reflecting Americans' infrequent Bible reading, 45% of the public can name fewer than five of the Ten Commandments, according to the *Christianity Today* survey.

In addition, only 46% of U.S. adults can name all four Gospels of the New Testament and only four in 10 know that, according to the Bible, Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount. These findings are based on a survey conducted for Robert H. Schuller, that also shows that 35% do not know the number of Jesus's disciples and 30% do not know the birthplace of Jesus.

HOPFFUL SIGNS

While Bible readership and knowledge are low, there are certain encouraging signs.

First, the percentage of persons who read the Bible daily is higher today (15%) than in 1944, when only one in 10 (10%) read the Bible every day.

Another positive note: a slight improvement in Biblical knowledge has been registered since a 1954 Gallup survey in the proportions who know that Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount (from 34% in 1954 to 42% today), can name all four Gospels (35% to 46%), and know where Jesus was born (64% to 70%).

Finally, a recent survey for the Christian Broadcasting Network found a rise, to 26%, in the percentage of persons involved in Bible study groups. The figure is still higher for teenagers (41%).

The same survey suggests that this new interest will continue at least for the immediate future, with 60% of current Bible study participants saying they expect to become still more involved, and one in six non-participants anticipating such involvement in the near future.

FOUR REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD ORDER *RELIGION IN AMERICA, '84*

1. *Religion in America, 1984* is an invaluable source of information on religious beliefs and practices in the U.S. and abroad, much of which is not available elsewhere.

2. It provides national and regional norms against which the clergy can match their own churches or synagogues in terms of religious belief, practice, knowledge and stewardship.

3. It provides new and exciting information that can be developed into sermons or articles on the state of religion.

4. It provides data indispensable for future planning: What are the new religious interests of church members and non-members? Where does the public think churches are falling short?

Teens Say Religion Very Important

America's teenagers continue to report that religion is an important factor in their lives.

For the past six years teenagers have been remarkably consistent in reporting the importance of religious beliefs in their lives. The latest findings from the Gallup Youth Survey are a carbon copy of previous years' results, with 43% saying religious beliefs are very important to them, 40% fairly important, 12% not too important, and only 4% not at all important.

Nearly four in 10 teenagers (39%), however, say that religion is less important to them than to their parents. A smaller proportion (33%) say religion is more important to them, and 24% believe religion is of equal importance to them and their parents.

Teenagers from the Southern "Bible Belt" states show the highest level of religious influence, with about six in 10 (59%) saying religion is important in their lives. Southern teenagers also are more likely to believe religion is more important to them than to their parents with 39% expressing this view compared to 33% who say it is less important. By contrast, only 24% of teens from the West say religion is more important to them than to their parents.

DIFFERENCES FOUND BY AGE AND SEX

Differences in degree of religiosity also are found according to age and sex. Religious beliefs are very important to 45% of the young women surveyed and 37% say religion is more important to them than to their parents. The comparable figures for young men are 41% who report religion is very important and only 30% who say it is more important to them than to their parents. Among those who are 13 to 15 years old, 38% say religion is more important to them, but this proportion drops to 29% by ages 16 to 18.

Protestants are more likely than Catholics to say religion is very important to them, by a 49% to 40% margin. Catholics (42%) are also more likely than Protestants (37%) to say that their interest in religion is less important to them than that of their parents.

As would be expected, regular church attenders show the highest sense of importance of religious beliefs (61%), but it is interesting to note that even among those who do not attend church regularly, 24% still say their religious beliefs are very important to them.

These are the questions asked:

How important to you are your religious beliefs – very important, fairly important, not too important, or not at all important?

Do you feel religion is more important or less important to you, personally, than it is to your parents?

The findings are based on telephone interviews with a representative national cross-section of 508 teenagers, ages 13 through 18, conducted from April to June.

IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION IN LIVES OF TEENS

	Very	Fairly	Not too	Not at all
	%	%	%	%
NATIONAL	43	40	12	4
Boys	41	39	15	5
Girls	45	42	9	3
Ages 13 to 15	45	43	10	2
Ages 16 to 18	41	39	13	5
Above-average students	41	42	13	4
Average or below	46	39	11	4
East	36	43	16	5
Midwest	41	45	12	2
South	59	32	7	2
West	34	41	13	11
Protestant	49	40	9	1
Catholic	40	44	11	4
Attend church regularly	61	34	4	–
Do not attend regularly	24	48	20	8

(No opinion, 1% nationally, omitted.)

IS RELIGION MORE – OR LESS – IMPORTANT THAN TO PARENTS?

	More	Same	Less	Don't know
	%	%	%	%
NATIONAL	33	24	39	4
Boys	30	22	44	4
Girls	37	26	34	3
Ages 13 to 15	38	22	35	5
Ages 16 to 18	29	26	42	3
Above-average students	32	24	41	3
Average or below	36	24	36	4
East	34	20	44	2
Midwest	33	23	37	7
South	39	24	33	4
West	24	31	42	3
Protestant	33	23	37	7
Catholic	30	26	42	2
Attend church regularly	33	32	33	2
Do not attend regulary	34	16	45	5

77% Satisfied With Personal Life

A recent Gallup survey finds an upbeat mood among white people in the nation, but continuing pessimism among black Americans.

The proportion of whites who express satisfaction with "the way things are going in their own personal lives" is now at 82% compared to an already high 77% recorded last November. Among blacks, the current satisfaction figure is 50% compared to 56% in the earlier survey.

Whites today also are considerably more satisfied with "the way things are going in the nation" – the other dimension explored in this mood barometer – than they were last fall, 39% compared to 24%. Blacks, on the other hand, are as gloomy today as earlier, with 13% now saying they are satisfied with trends in the nation compared to 12% a year ago.

These questions were asked:

In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in your own personal life?

In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in the U.S. at this time?

Following are the trends on satisfaction with personal life:

OUTLOOK TOWARD PERSONAL LIFE
(Percent satisfied)

	Blacks %	Whites %	Total %
1983: August	50	82	77
1982: November	56	77	75
April	49	80	76
1981: December	61	84	81
June	59	84	81
January	68	82	81
1979: November	50	83	79
February	55	80	77

And here are the trends on the outlook for the nation as a whole:

OUTLOOK TOWARD NATION
(Percent satisfied)

	Blacks %	Whites %	Total %
1983: August	13	39	35
1982: November	12	24	24
April	5	28	25
1981: December	13	29	27
June	15	35	33
January	19	18	17
1979: November	19	18	19
February	24	26	26

BLACK TEENS MORE UPBEAT THAN ADULTS

Black teenagers are considerably more optimistic about their own personal lives than are black adults, with 76% of black teens saying they are satisfied with the way things are going in their lives, not far below the figure of 84% recorded for white teenagers in a recent Gallup Youth Survey.

A wide gap in satisfaction levels, however, is found between white and black teenagers on satisfaction with trends in the nation, with twice the proportion of whites (43%) as blacks (20%) expressing satisfaction with the way things are going in the nation.

The latest results for adults are based on in-person interviews with 1,497 adults, 18 and older, conducted in more than 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period August 5-8.

PERCENTAGE OF INCOME CONTRIBUTED TO CHURCH

	10% or more %	5-9% %	Less than 5% %	None %	Don't know %
Total	16	13	33	26	12
Catholic	8	14	46	21	11
Protestant	22	14	29	22	13
Southern Baptist	37	10	31	17	5
Baptist	28	14	29	20	9
Methodist	12	15	35	23	15
Lutheran	15	18	30	20	17

Source: *from a study conducted for* Christianity Today *by the Gallup Organization Inc. and The Princeton Religion Research Center.*

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Sincerely,

George Gallup Jr.

George Gallup Jr.
Executive Director

'Religion In America, 1984' Report To Offer Steps For Church Growth

With recent surveys revealing a surge of interest among Americans in religious and spiritual matters, as well as growing involvement in a variety of religious activities, the challenge for churches in the immediate years ahead is to channel this new interest into solid religious commitment.

But before churches can develop the appropriate strategies, they need to be aware of the current levels of religious belief, practice and knowledge among Americans. The new report, RELIGION IN AMERICA, 1984, is designed to provide solid, actionable information of this kind.

Here are some of the key sections in the 1984 report to be published in January by the Gallup Organization:

- PRACTICAL WAYS TO STRENGTHEN THE CHURCHES. The steadily increasing availability of survey data on religion points to practical ways to strengthen religious commitment and reach the unchurched.
- ANALYSES OF CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP. Because no other organization regularly measures America's churchgoing habits, the Gallup Poll has lent its fact-finding services for this purpose. The data in this section include trends in churchgoing and church membership by major faiths and denominations.
- PROFILES OF MAJOR FAITHS AND DENOMINATIONS. The religious preferences of more than 40,000 Americans surveyed during 1983 are examined in terms of age, sex, race, level of education, region and many other background characteristics.
- THE RELIGIOUS WORLD OF AMERICAN TEENAGERS. An in-depth examination of the religious beliefs, practices and knowledge of this important segment of the population, who will have much to do with the shape of religion in the future.
- UPDATES OF OTHER LONG-TERM GALLUP TRENDS IN RELIGION. Many of these indicators have become basic and standard measurements of the state of organized religion in the U.S. They include not only church attendance, membership, and religious preference, but also basic religious beliefs, the importance placed on religion, and confidence in organized religion.

HOW TO ORDER
RELIGION IN AMERICA, 1984

Religion In America, 1984 can be ordered from the Gallup Organization, Inc., P.O. Box 310, Princeton, New Jersey 08542 for $25.00.

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